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In Solidarity Epilogue

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Published In

Tillmann, L.M. (2015). Epilogue. In L.M. Tillmann (Ed.), *In Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism Beyond Gay and Straight*. New York: Routledge.

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Epilogue¹

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I sip coffee, reflecting on what moves toward closure and what remains unfinished. If *Between Gay and Straight* bookends this leg of the journey, *In Solidarity* required 13 years to live, compose, and publish. So much happened:

9/11.
 U.S. invasion
 and occupation.
 Recession.
 Mass incarceration.

Hope.

Health care legislation passing.
 Boots-on-ground militarism waning.
 LGBT equality ascending.

Change?

NSA watching,
 listening,
 meta-data analyzing.
 Drones' Hellfire raining.
 A sick planet perilously warming.

Rereading this manuscript, I note that *In Solidarity* has a more serious tone and political thrust than did *Between Gay and Straight*—a product of the years in which I wrote; of the shift in my professional life from a mainstream department of Communication to a program I spearheaded in Critical Media and Cultural Studies; and of the trajectory of my personal life: divorce, disillusion, dating, dissolution, and depression, with which I have struggled much of my

¹ The most updated version of this piece appears in the book *In Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism Beyond Gay and Straight* (Routledge 2015).

life but most acutely in 2006 and 2013.

As fingers tap keys, I ponder that transformative period from 1994 to 1998, when my graduate education at the University of South Florida intertwined with the lives, relationships, and stories of a network of gay male friends. Emotion rises in my chest as I think of David Holland, the man who invited me into that network. I saw David most recently in June 2014, when he drove to Orlando to provide dinner and cheer.

Thinking of my old friend sparks memories of my ex-husband, Doug Healy, who introduced me to David and connected me to the Suncoast Softball League. I stare at a white screen a long time before words come. Though I haven't seen Doug since 2012, I feel profound gratitude for the many ways he facilitated this project. I send a blessing of loving kindness: Doug, may you be safe; may you be happy; may you be healthy; may you live with ease.

I sit back, hands encircling a steaming mug. I call voices and faces of other old friends to mind: Tim Mahn, Rob Ryan, Pat Martinez, Jeff Grasso, Al, Stew, Joe, Bob, and Kem of the Cove team; Mike Fried, a political soul mate, and his partner and my friend since 1997, Rick Merrifield, who shot key photographs for *Between Gay and Straight*, including the one on its cover.

As I lean back in my white leather swivel chair, warm thoughts arise of Matt Moretti ("Don't Ask, Don't Tell") and his siblings Elisabeth, Paul, and Ashley. In November 2013, Matt invited me to the home he still shares with Josh to reunite with a patio full of Moretti siblings, spouses, and children, including Elisabeth and her partner Ruth and Paul and his wife Faye. The boisterous group clearly relished being together—and made me long for a larger family!

Next to enter my mind: the Wise men, Ray and Stephen ("Father's Blessing"), among the most committed and facilitative participants with whom I ever have worked. In 2010, Ray earned

a combined MBA and Masters in Healthcare Administration. Employed as a project manager for a large managed care consortium, he now resides in Colorado.

I head downstairs for a fresh cup of Sumatra. While steaming water hisses and spits from my Kuerig, a smile crosses my lips. I think of Gordon Bernstein (“Passings”), his father Tex, his late mother Marilyn, his godfather Bob, and Bob’s wife Eve. Gordon gave us a scare in 2012. Crushing headaches and a meningioma diagnosis required radiation and entail continued monitoring and stress management. My friend still lives with Todd, his partner since 2000, in the same house in Ft. Lauderdale. Tex winters nearby and has a lady companion. Gordon said recently of his dad, “He’s as happy as I’ve ever seen him.”

Ascending the stairs, I pause to regard another family: Donovan Marshall, his parents John and Barb, and his former partner, Jackson Jones. In some ways, “Revisiting Don/ovan” ends quite unhappily, with relational dissolution: Donovan and Jackson, Doug and me, and later, John and Barb as well. Sometimes endings open new possibilities. In 2009, Donovan moved to Madison to be with his current partner, to whom he got engaged on June 7, 2014. Hopefully by the time you read this, there will be marriage equality in Wisconsin—if not the entire U.S. Other times, however, endings close doors. In November 2013, Donovan told me that he and his dad had not spoken for some time. I send peace and light to them, hoping they find their way back together.

Back at my desk, I feel overwhelmed with gratitude toward my parents John and Beth Tillmann and my academic parents, Art Bochner and Carolyn Ellis. Art and Carolyn mentored me through my dissertation and its publication as *Between Gay and Straight*. Both also reviewed the entire *Going Home* section of this book as well as several other pieces and consulted on my proposal for *In Solidarity*. Other “without whom” mentors include Robert Ruberto, retired from

Lincoln High School, and professors Lynn Turner and Helen Sterk.

My mind runs through a slide show of other key colleagues: Kathryn Norsworthy, Norman Denzin, Mitch Allen, Keith Berry, Carol Rambo, Stacy Holman Jones, Tony Adams, Chris Poulos, Bill Rawlins, Ron Pelias, Derek Bolen, Christine Kiesinger, and Carrie Schulz, all of whom have facilitated production, presentation, and/or publication of my work. With elbows propped upon the desk, I rest my chin on folded hands.

Next to cross my mental screen are those especially influential in my development as a campus activist and progressive academic: Donna Lee and Mahjabeen Rafiuddin, former directors of Multicultural Affairs at Rollins College; Denise Cummings, my Critical Media and Cultural Studies collaborator; and my Faculty United (FU) comrades: Kathryn Norsworthy, Larry VanSickle, Ed Royce, and Eric Schutz.

I bring my left foot to rest on the chair as I contemplate fellow members of the Orlando Anti-Discrimination Ordinance (OADO) committee: founder and master organizer Michael Slaymaker, force of nature Mary Meeks, Joe Saunders (now a state representative), Pat Padilla (also of PFLAG), Joyce Hamilton Henry (also of the ACLU), Mallory Garner-Wells and Michael Farmer (also of Equality Florida), poet and caretaker Drew Weinbrenner, filmmaker Vicki Nantz, Tom Woodard, Randy Stephens, Patrick Howell, and of course, Kathryn Norsworthy, the best friend, collaborator, co-author, and human being one could encounter. Thank you, Kathryn, for your presence and humanity and for loving Deena, my other sounding board in life and love and my key mentor in music and mischief.

My mind then beholds Dave Dietz, my friend since 1995 and film collaborator since 2005. No one has been more influential in developing my artistry, and no one better affirms that laughter saves projects, relationships, and lives.

As I type, something familiar pricks in my chest. More than usual today, I grieve the 2012 deaths of ethnographer-tricksters Bud Goodall and Nick Trujillo. I hope they would have been moved by *In Solidarity* and would have found it worthy of use in their classes.

My gratitude toward Bud and Nick mixes with that which I feel toward my academic home since 1999. Rollins College has supported this project via a McKean and several Critchfield research grants. I then consider the incalculable debt I owe to Phillip Vannini and Margaret Moore at Routledge as well as the anonymous reviewers of my proposal and manuscript. Thank you for believing in the merit of this work and for helping it find an audience.

And finally, I begin formulating thoughts of my two main men, Linus, the basset hound asleep at my feet, his body stretched from his doggie chaise to the tribal rug of magenta, violet, and pink, and John, my love since 2008. I close with a story whose conclusion has yet to be written.

June 26, 2013. Kathryn Norsworthy, Deena Flamm, Margaret McLaren, and I hear Jeff Toobin, CNN Senior Legal Analyst, say, “DOMA is gone.”

We hop around Kathryn and Deena’s back bedroom whooping and cheering. Deena reaches for Kathryn, telling her, “I love you.”

“Love you two, baby girl.”

“We love you BOTH!” Margaret and I chorus. Kathryn and Deena open their arms and bring us in for a group hug.

Into my ear, Deena says, “Love you too.”

“So, so much,” adds Kathryn.

I look at my three friends’ joyful faces and say, “I think I’ll get married.”

Their shouts overlap: “Whoa!” “Woo hoo!” “Hoopla!”

At last, Margaret queries, “Um ... does John know?”

“He will soon,” I say. “A long time John has waited—for me to heal, for a less unequal terrain. If you need me, I’ll be at home, awaiting his return.”

At 6:15 p.m., our electronic gate beeps and swings open as John’s half-ton Tundra lumbers over the pavers. Linus bounds clumsily down the staircase, yelping. John and I cross paths in the doorway between the dining room and kitchen. “Congratulations,” he says, arms encircling my waist. “I know today meant a lot to you and our friends.”

I clear my throat. “Hon ... I’m thinking ... maybe it’s time to get married.”

“I’ve been thinking that for five years,” he quips. I return his smile. John then asks, “Is this because of DOMA?”

“This is because I love you,” I reply. “And because of DOMA.” I stare into his camouflage green eyes and stroke the mountain-man scruffle on his chin. “What do you say? Will you marry me, John Sansoucie?”

“Any day, any place.”

“Well, we can’t do it in Florida,” I muse.

He grins. “Now how did I know you would say that?”

Later that night, I phone my friend Al, a member of the original Cove softball team. He now lives in San Francisco with his partner Marc. In May 2013, at their home just outside the Castro, they hosted John, John’s parents, and me for dinner. When Al picks up, I barely can hear him over the revelry. Today Californians celebrate both the demise of DOMA and the Supreme

Court's Prop 8 decision, which stopped short of establishing a federal right to same-sex marriage but cleared the path for marriage equality in California. "Hey, my dear!" Al says, sounding high on justice and maybe a bit of champagne.

"I'm calling to say congratulations," I loudly reply, "and to let you know I'm getting married!"

"What's that, honey?" asks Al amid a cacophony of car horns and cheering.

"Married! I'm getting married!"

Beat. Then, "Oh, yay! When? Where?"

"Not sure," I say. "Maybe on this historic date. But definitely in a marriage equality state."

Al lets out a full-throated laugh. "That is so *you*! Say, you could marry at our house."

My eyes open wide. "We just might do that!"

So that's the plan: Al and Marc's house, June 2014. John and I decided against the 26th, but only because it fell on a Thursday. Except Al and Marc, everyone in attendance will be traveling, most of us cross-country. We settled instead on Saturday, June 21. It will be my parents' 45th wedding anniversary.

* * *

The above would have made an "into the sunset" ending to *In Solidarity*. Indeed it *was* the ending until April 25, 2014, when tread marks appeared suddenly on the road to John's and my wedding. We remain domestic partners, committed to each other and to discovering where our path now leads.

Thus the personal mirrors the political. We try to look deeply and see clearly exactly where we are. We celebrate achievements, face setbacks, and grieve losses. At the same time, we

keep envisioning a place of greater equity, peace, hope, joy, and love and doing what we can to co-create it.

In solidarity,

Lisa M. Tillmann